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BRICS and Global South: Towards Multilateral Educational Collaboration¹

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the discussion of the educational policies of the BRICS countries in the context of rising Global South. The author argues that BRICS grouping is better understood not as a union of the countries based upon common identity or a set of the values, but as a group, which is held together by certain imaginaries. These imaginaries are a vision of alternative world order on the one hand and of the emerging Global South on the other hand. Education, then, plays a pivotal role in BRICS collaboration, because it helps to develop and to spread these imaginaries. The article analyses multilateral educational collaboration in BRICS in comparison with excellence programmes devoted to establishment of elite world-class universities and oriented at indicators of the main international academic rankings. The author argues that such projects as BRICS Network University are much more relevant to the tasks of South-South collaboration than the excellence programmes such as Russian 5/100 one. In conclusion, the author attracts readers' attention to the multiple modernities theories as possible rationale for BRICS cooperation or South-South collaboration in general.

KEYWORDS

South-South cooperation, multiple modernities theories, BRICS collaboration, BRICS Network University, education policies of the BRICS countries, excellence projects in higher education, Russian 5/100 project, Global South

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Introduction

BRICS as an international grouping has always been an odd phenomenon. Its first summit in Yekaterinburg has effectively been a result of the invitation of Brazil to a traditional meeting of Russia, India and China (Stuenkel, 2015, p. 10); its second summit would probably not take place if Brazilian President Lula had not invited the leaders to meet together for the second time in the Brazilian capital (Stuenkel, 2015, p. 34). Nothing seemed to unite these very different and distant countries except their resentment of the Bretton Woods institutions as well as of other elements of the global governance system. As President Lula has famously noted after G8 summit in France, to which India, Brazil and South Africa had been invited as mere observers: “We do not want to participate only to eat the dessert; we want to eat the main course, dessert and then coffee” (Kurtz, 2013).

BRICS countries, however, had (and still have) very different opinions on free trade, security, role of existing global governance institutions etc. India and China still dispute territorial issues, and Indian aspiration to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council has been successfully blocked by a fellow BRICS country. It is not surprising then, that some experts have quite persuasively argued that

these countries have basically nothing in common whatsoever, except that they are called BRICS and they are quite important. However, in all other respects, their interests and values, political systems, and objectives are substantially diverse. Therefore, there’s no reason whatsoever to expect them to agree on anything substantive in the world, except that the existing dominating powers should cede some of their influence and power. That’s the one thing they have in common (Alessi, 2012).

This also explains the fact why BRICS gatherings were always looked upon quite skeptically by the overwhelming majority of the Western commentators.

Over time, however, BRICS managed to develop a number of international forums and a complex system of negotiation between the governments, which, following Joseph Nye, could be called “trans-governmental” (Nye, 2002, p. 106). Every year different ministers keep meeting to discuss new (and sometimes very innovative) forms of collaboration. What does drive them if not commonalities between the countries? Why for more than ten years does the BRICS grouping hold together and even manage to develop not only new forums, but also some new institutions (such as, for example, New Development Bank)? The answer seems to lie not in the present events, but in the horizon of the future, and not in what could be found in reality, but rather in what is imagined.

The characteristic that made the BRICS countries identify with the concept and resulted in common action as a political and economic grouping was not a shared identity... Instead, it was the realization that they share a common vision for a new global order, and that by combining forces in a small but strategic group that binds Asia, Africa and Latin America together, they had a better chance of realizing that vision (De Coning et al., 2015, p. 1).

In other words, it is the vision, the imaginary, which really matters in the case of BRICS collaboration. Apparently, part of this imaginary is a vision of an alternative world order.

It is this vision which seems to have brought about so-called “BRICS plus” format or the idea of expansion BRICS collaboration to other Global South countries. This format, proposed by China and for the first time implemented at Xiamen summit of 2017, has matured under South African Presidency, who invited to Johannesburg summit of 2018 not only important African countries, but also the countries, representing various regional communities of the Global South, such as, for example, Argentina, Indonesia, Egypt, Jamaica and Turkey. BRICS engagement with Global South for promoting South-South cooperation seems to be another powerful imaginary, which holds BRICS countries together. Of course, whether BRICS grouping is able to become a voice of the Global South is still very unclear. What is obvious, however, is that the survival of BRICS very much depends upon its success in providing leadership to the emerging Global South.

Development of these basic imaginaries of the alternative world ordering and of the South-South cooperation can help us to explain the fact why various “softer” types of collaboration like, for example, people-to-people exchanges play increasingly great role in BRICS “inter-governmentality”. Arguably, the most important of these collaborations is educational one.

Social imaginaries are always developed through scholarship (mostly in humanities and social sciences), and are installed via education. This is how the imaginary, “idea” or “theory” usually sizes the masses, and, by the same token, becomes a material force (Marx, 1970, p. 137). It is understandable, then, why South African Minister of Higher Education, Ms. Naledi Pandor in her opening speech at the third Annual BRICS Network University Conference highlighted importance of the BRICS NU platform for educational collaboration as “deeply entrenched within BRICS”. She also emphasized its importance for Global South: “in fact a lot is expected from it, not only by the BRICS leaders and countries, but by the entire developing world”. BRICS Network University “can foster new dynamics in South-South cooperation, while fostering intellectual bonds and exchanges among the BRICS academic community” (Pandor, 2018).

These considerations do explain importance of education in the context of BRICS and Global South. The situation, however, is very complex, since education both has very important national tasks, and is an element of the nation's global performance. International aspect applies, of course, mostly to the higher education. That is why it is higher education, which is mostly ridden with contradictions today: contradictions between national tasks and international performance or between its functions in developing imaginaries and its role in competition on the global educational market. These tensions are expressed among other things in the contradictions between domestically focused education and internationally oriented university research, or between university policy, oriented at supporting important publications in national language and the policy focused on international journals of high reputation.

These contradictions, being rather moderate in the developed Global North countries, naturally become extreme in Global South. The universities of established

reputations do not have to compromise their missions for the sake of international advancement, but the situation of the “emerging universities” is rather different. Thus, any university of the developing world, which, following its mission, chooses to publish its research outputs in open access resources, available in national language, would seriously undermine its performance in World University rankings, and, thus, would weaken its position in global competition for the most talented (or just simply rich) international students.

This article is devoted to the discussion of one of these numerous contradictions between global orientation of the universities, and the necessity for them to play important role in domestic affairs through addressing local problems and developing valuable imaginaries. This tension among other things is expressed in contradiction between various global excellence projects on the one hand, and horizontally structured university networks and associations. The article will discuss this tension in terms of its relevance to the development of educational collaboration of the BRICS and Global South countries.

Does Global South Have a Place in Global Academic Revolution?

Higher education today is experiencing a period of most radical transformation, rapidly changing content and structure of education everywhere in the world. These changes are so drastic that some attentive observers have even coined the term academic revolution to describe what is happening in the sphere of higher education today. What is meant here are four main processes, which jointly determine radical changes in today's university environment. The processes in question are massification, commercialization, globalization and internationalization (Altbach et al., 2009).

These four processes, however, are not separate ones. They are so tightly interconnected and entwined that they seem to be the aspects of a single global transformation, of one general trend. On the one hand, the growing middle class in a number of the Global South countries is seeking access to tertiary education abroad, thus contributing to both internationalization and massification of the universities in the Global North. On the other hand, internationalization almost inevitably leads to a higher degree of commercialization, simply because it seems to be very difficult to persuade national taxpayers to support international students. As in any transnational corporation, in the university today nationally defined common good comes into conflict with internationally attracted resources and worldwide activity. Global presence, contributing to making world a global campus, as in the famous David Lodge's novel (*Small World: An Academic Romance*, 1984), thus, also transforms the university into transnational commercial enterprise. The four elements of the academic revolution, thus, do intertwine, contributing together to the worldwide process of radical transformation.

It follows that this transformation is neo-liberal in its essence (Khomyakov, 2016, p. 396). Namely, one of its obvious results is treating higher education not as an important public good, but rather as a product for international sale (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 11; Rhoads et al., 2014; Dill & Soo 2005, p. 253). The logic of the public good has

been substituted with the logic of the private commercial brand and the Humboldtian idea of individual development gave way to the educational services provided by the universities. The result is a phenomenon of educational capitalism, which threatens washing out non-commercial values (Sandel, 2012, p. 114). As commercial enterprises, the universities stop performing some of their important social functions, such as, for example, enhancing social equality through inclusive comprehensive education or providing moral education to the future citizens (Sandel, 2012, p. 203).

Internationalization is certainly one of the most prominent aspects of this global transformation. Explosive growth of the young population in such countries as Nigeria (median age 18.4 years), India (27.9), Ethiopia (17.9), Kenya (19.7), Philippines (23.5), Pakistan (23.8), Angola (15.9) and Nepal (24.1) make them potentially very attractive markets to recruit foreign students from. The shortage of the institutions of tertiary education combined with the gradual growth of the middle class leads to an increasing number of the young people from these countries seeking paid education abroad. It is very important to notice at this point that the academic neo-liberal revolution thus further reinforces the gap between the Global South and the Global North. The first is treated as a source of potential students, bringing money to the economies of Europe and North America. This growing gap certainly exhibits neo-colonial nature of the global educational market structure.

In the countries of Global North itself, the resulting commercialization of the universities is increasingly blurring boundaries between public and private education. Thus, in many public universities in the US, for example, only one fifth of the budget comes from different public sources (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 14). This fact does make us wonder in which sense education in the “developed world” still could be called public.

All these considerations mean that both internationalization and the academic revolution in general, not only bring with them putative or real openness, inclusiveness or equality. They also lead to the consolidation of the global educational market, to fierce competition among both universities and national educational systems, to the substitution of the nationally oriented approaches with transnational commercial education as well as to the gradual disappearance of the concept of education as a public good and, consequently to the aggravating struggle of the universities for the material and human resources both domestically and internationally. They also contribute to the ever-growing gap between South and North and, by the same token, to the condition of radical global inequality. In short, internationalization and globalization accompany processes of formation of the global educational capitalist system.

It is not surprising then, that formation of the global educational market led to the emergence of the new private business of academic rankings. The Big Academic Three, composed of Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU, also known as Shanghai Ranking), Times Higher Education ranking and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World Academic ranking seems to have monopolized this business globally. Ostensibly meant to provide a reliable guide in the global landscape of the higher education, the rankings in reality led to the aggravation of global inequality, to creation of new neo-colonial disciplinary practice as well as to the unprecedented pressure on both the national governments and universities. This pressure led, among other

things to the inclination of the university leaders to use the results of the rankings in the strategic planning even if they believe that the picture provided by the rankings distorts the reality gravely. Thus, E. Hazelkorn (2011) noted that while the majority of the leaders of the higher education institutions (HEIs) believe that the university rankings favor old universities (89%), establish hierarchy of HEIs (82%), are open to distortion and inaccuracies (81%), at the same time they are also inclined to use the results of the rankings in setting goals for strategic planning (63%) and to consider them as providing important comparative information (73%). Only 40% of these leaders, however, believe that the rankings provide valid assessment of the higher education quality (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 94).

The very logic of the world university rankings seems to imply favoring those institutions, which are already very powerful. Indeed, the concept of world-class university (WCU) as it has been developed by a number of scholars, is based upon understanding a WCU as an institution, which attracts talents and resources globally and is effectively led towards this aim by a team of good professionals (Salmi, 2009). This is clearly a circular way of defining world-class university, since, of course, only the universities of already existing high world reputation are able to attract talents and resources. In a way, this definition almost tautologically says to us that only those universities are world-class ones, which already have the reputation of those. In other words, World-Class University is one, which is recognized as such globally. This, in its turn, directly implies that it is almost a tautology that Harvard University, Cambridge, Yale and Oxford represent world-class universities.

This means that this vicious circle of the reputation in the rankings produces what Robert Merton has famously called a “Matthew effect” – the situation, when those who already have the reputation gain everything, and those without established reputation continue to lose the resources (Rigney, 2010; Safón, 2013, p. 230; Hazelkorn, 2011, pp. 19–20, 76). What rankings produce, then, is a greater inequality in reputation, and, therefore, in resources the universities are able to attract. Rankings, thus, are usually biased to old, established, large traditional universities.

Inequality, fostered by these reputational gaps is twofold. On the global scale, there is obvious inequality between the nations: rankings do favour British and American model of research university more than, say, socially responsible highly autonomous institutions of some continental European countries (Safón, 2013; Saisana & D’Hombres, 2008; Jeremic et al., 2011, p. 595; Altbach, 2006, p. 79; Mei Li et al., 2011).

At the domestic level, the schools of inherited reputation usually perform better in all main league tables. International rankings seem to favor traditionally leading schools of particular nation, such as, say, Moscow State University in Russia or Al-Farabi National Kazakh University in Kazakhstan. Their international reputation is very much inherited, while the other universities in the same country must build it sometimes from scratch. It certainly makes the task of building world-class universities even more formidable for the schools, which for the moment do not have the reputation of belonging to this rather elite club. After all, the majority of the rankings elevate institutions “with advanced reputation in both teaching and research, as historical bearers of state mission” (Pusser & Marginson, 2013, pp. 555–557).

Thus, domestically international rankings reinforce inequality between elite and mass higher education institutions, while globally they widen the gaps between perceived educational metropolises and deeply provincial “periphery”. That is why B. Pusser and S. Marginson describe the project of the world academic rankings as “neo-imperial” and argue that “because the norms of ranking systems are mostly consistent with the world’s strongest higher education institutions located in the United States, this disciplinary effect is especially invidious in nation-states outside the United States. Despite the global variations in resources, states of development, national histories, traditions, languages and cultures, institutions outside the United States are pressed into following the template of the globally dominant universities...” (Pusser & Marginson, 2013, p. 558). Thus, “...the state project being pursued here is not simply national but also neo-imperial, being most closely tailored to the interests of the nations traditionally dominant in the higher education sector: the Western nations and, above all, the English-speaking nations led by the United States and United Kingdom” (Pusser & Marginson, 2013, p. 559).

Thus, the majority of the universities from the Global South countries lose in this competition independently of their active participation in the race. Those who abstain, lose from the very start; those who participate, find it impossible to compete with the established centres of academic power, and eventually lose anyway. The arrival of the new technologies resulting in the things like MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) does not really make this world more open and equal. In the condition of transnational educational capitalism, open courses lead to further exclusion and inequality. Thus, Zembylas and Vrasidas (2005) claimed that instead of helping to create a culturally neutral “global village”, digital networks helped Western countries to colonize the world again, to increase their opportunities and to expand their reach. S. A. Rye (2014) demonstrated how seemingly “democratic” (meant to be inclusive, equality-based) Norwegian online courses, which involved both Norwegian and African students, produced in reality some new important inequalities and exclusions. African students, for example, had to deal with various cultural peculiarities, built in the very structure of the course, and, in result, were not always capable of demonstrating the same level of the performance as the students from Norway. Thus, with all their democratic potential and the millions of the on-line students taking courses in the best world-class universities, the MOOCs do not necessarily contribute to the narrowing the gap between Global North and Global South.

The growing gap between Global North and Global South makes the universities in the emerging economy countries seek an effective strategy for overcoming most serious differences. Arguably, there are two possible strategies here: the first one is an attempt to gain a proper share of the global educational market through active participation in the worldwide excellence race, while the second one is rather a quest for an alternative vision. In terms of the existing structure of academic power, the first one consists in active participation in educational neo-colonialism described above, while the second one tries to implement anti-colonial principles of a more or less radical nature. By the same token, the first one is about better integration to Global Academia, while the second one rather concerns creation of additional alternative networks and consortia. The best implementations of the first are various national

excellence projects, whereas the second is the main focus of horizontal network programmes. Quite naturally, then, the integration strategy is totally in agreement with current neo-liberal transformation of global education; the networks, however, represent an ambitious attempt to find an alternative to the transnational educational capitalism. Finally, integration to the World Academia today means orientation at creation of the elite world-class university, but the horizontal networks focus primarily on peculiar problems of the Global South societies.

Many universities in the BRICS countries (especially in China and Russia with their extensive excellence projects such as “project 985” in China and 5-100 project in Russia) today seem to play both games simultaneously, thus trying not too consistently both to get their share of the neo-colonial pie and to find alternatives to the dominant power structure. This is very unsustainable situation, of course, because it does make one suspect masking neo-imperial fight for markets. In other words, it is still very unclear whether BRICS countries are able and willing to find an alternative for the existing power distribution or they are simply fighting for the bigger share of this power. In the context of neoliberal knowledge society discourse, education and science are directly connected to these power structures.

Now, it is too early to judge what in reality is going on in higher education systems of the BRICS countries and Global South in general. On the one hand, in their attempts to build World-Class Universities many of these countries tend to reproduce external Northern models and play old game of market competition in the global educational space. On the other hand, through forming horizontal university networks and enhancing South-South educational cooperation, BRICS countries do try to form an alternative vision of international education. The struggle between these two tendencies seems to reflect general contradiction of the BRICS policies between neo-colonial and inclusive models of the development. In any case, the future of the BRICS block seems to depend very much on which of these tendencies would finally win. In what follows I will briefly analyze these two opposite currents in educational development policies of the BRICS countries.

Excellence Projects: Paving the Way for the Transnational Education

The impact of the new transnational higher education upon national systems of higher education is especially strong in the countries, struggling for better representation in the global educational market. This struggle is most strongly intensified by the obsession with the academic rankings that can sometimes lead to compromising national goals and domestic traditions in higher education. There is, for instance, an example of Japan, whose government has recently recommended to the universities not to spend precious resources for humanities and social sciences and to close the relevant departments (“Japanese government asks universities to close social sciences and humanities faculties”, 2015). Humanities are national in the essence, and they naturally lose their place in the new transnational order of higher education.

This bias is only very natural for the rankings, which tend to favour hard sciences over humanities. Humanities do not produce new technologies and are not considered

to be useful for generating revenues (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012, p. 287). Moreover, with their focus upon the development of national cultures, humanities' research output cannot be properly measured by international citation indexes. Finally, by both tradition and their nature, humanities are still very much books- rather than journals- oriented disciplines. This fact also adds to the difficulties of the "objective" measurement favoured by the world university rankings, since even world's top historians or philosophers very often have comparatively low h-index.

It does make sense, then, to agree with Rauhvargers (2013), who describes the rankings as (1) focusing on elite universities; (2) relatively neglectful of the arts, humanities and social sciences, and (3) reliant upon such poor indicators as, for example, faculty/students ratio in measuring teaching quality (Rauhvargers, 2013, pp. 17–19). Those who want to get quickly higher positions in the academic rankings, then, will have to support already rich universities, thus, contributing to further inequality growth as well as to sacrifice certain disciplines (especially those focused in human development, such as humanities) for the sake of the developing technology-oriented knowledge.

In other words, those who decide to participate actively in the global academic race must be ready to invest heavily in few elite institutions. For one thing, "a world-class university is a \$1–1.5 billion-a-year operation" (Hazelkorn, 2007, p. 1), and, for another, building new reputation is even more expensive than maintaining existing one. That is why among BRICS countries, since 1999 China has been spending in total about US\$6 billion for the programmes devoted to the creation of the world-class universities (WCUs). Russia in 2012–2017 invested US\$878.5 million in its well-known 5/100 Project, which supports enhancing "international competitiveness" of 21 best Russian institutions of higher education.

Despite some interesting results, the performance of the universities from the BRICS countries in the world academic rankings is still not too impressive. Even mainland China with all its huge investments has only seven universities in top 200 of the 2019 Times Higher Education (THE) ranking and seven universities in top 200 of the 2019 QS World University Ranking. Russia and South Africa had one university each in both rankings, India and Brazil are not represented in top 200 of THE. India has three universities, and Brazil – only one university in top 200 of the QS WUR. On the other hand, the UK is represented with 29 universities in top 200 of the both rankings. This is a good illustration of the huge gap in academic power and weight, which emerging economy countries are so desperately trying to bridge with their excellence projects.

In the end, then, it would appear that the main goal of the excellence initiatives is better integration into the world Academia rather than addressing most pressing domestic issues. In the Russian case, the project is openly oriented at enhancing performance of Russian universities on the global scale and has initially set the educational system an utterly unrealistic task to bring at least five universities to the top 100 of the world university rankings. In other cases the goals could be expressed in more subtle ways, but all of them invariably promote transnational technological education, which became a new educational normality of 21st century. Thus, internationalization becomes one of the most important goals of higher education development.

What is most important here is that in this quest for better integration to the world Academia the universities are compelled to change according to the external standards. Therefore, the negative impact of the rankings is far less “on institutions at the top of the global ranking tables that can determine their own identities” (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012, p. 287). In the emerging countries, however, sometimes even elite national institutions have been “partly displaced” by the top global universities (Marginson, 2007, p. 11). In the countries, which aspire for better positioning of their higher education systems in the main league tables, the impact of the rankings can become disastrous.

The rankings, thus, become a powerful disciplinary tool because they define both external standards and the best performers, thus becoming an important instrument for the benchmarking (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 42; Proulx, 2011). In the Russian case the main benchmarks for the best 5/100 universities are set based on the rankings. Thus, Higher School of Economics (Moscow), for example, chose London School of Economics and Political Science, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Humboldt University of Berlin, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and University of Warwick as its benchmarks (Programma HSE, 2013, pp. 6–7). Ural Federal University (Yekaterinburg), being a large technical school, focused on massive attracting foreign students from Asia, compared itself with Aalto University (Finland), Sungkyunkwan University and Yonsei University (both in South Korea), City University of Hong Kong and Tsinghua University (both in China). Interestingly, for Ural Federal University the main elements to compare were current position and historical dynamics of these universities in THE and QS academic rankings (Programma UrFU, 2013, pp. 6–7).

Another obvious feature of the excellence programmes is their orientation at creating WCUs, peculiar elite schools with distinct mission and purposes. Through supporting elite schools, the governments further increase basic educational inequalities in their societies. Those schools, recruiting best students from the best high schools, are thus getting additional support from the public sources. Since the majority of the best high school's alumni belong to upper middle class, the governments through the excellence initiatives indirectly subsidize those who by no means could be called the least advantaged members of the society. Excellence programmes, thus, are indirectly reinforcing social inequality.

It is not surprising, then, that the development programmes of the majority of the Russian university participants of 5/100 project do exhibit neo-liberal orientation at enhancing competitiveness or developing national economy (for example, Programma UrFU, 2013, p. 4). Integration to the Academia is defined not so much in terms of joining old good Republic of Letters, but rather as entering fierce competition for material and human resources. Internationalization, then, is used also as synonym for the market competitiveness (see also a powerful critique of the concept of international by Paesi, 2005).

The excellence projects have positive sides as well. They make the universities care about their reputation, set high standards and integrate research and education in global Academia. The projects stimulate researchers to publish in respected journals and motivate professors to create educational programmes able to attract good students. The rankings become an interesting benchmarking instrument and

do provide university management with some useful metrics. Undoubtedly, “rankings are here to stay. Even if academics are aware that the results of rankings are biased ... they also recognize that as impressive position in the rankings can be a key factor in securing additional resources...” (Rauhvargers, 2013, p. 25).

The quest for better integration to the market-driven world Academia, however, should not lead to forgetting the most pressing problems at home and to compromising their own missions by the university. The difficulty, thus, lies in finding a proper balance between orientation to the international standards and national or regional commitment of the higher education institution. It is not an easy task, however. In his welcome address to the participants of the 7th QS-APPLE conference held on 16–18 November 2011 in Manila, Fr. Rolando V. Dela Rosa, O. P. Rector of the University of Santo Thomas, noted that his university would probably become one of the world leading ones if the rankings took in consideration the number of saints produced by particular institution (“Which University Has More Saints?”, 2011). The seemingly joking nature of this remark should not obscure the obvious fact that many Global South countries like Philippines would probably need those aspiring to be the saints more than those who prepare for the career of the office manager. In any case, neoliberal world-class universities glorified by the world academic rankings do not seriously embody domestic social role of the university, the role, which is certainly important both for the Global South countries in general, and for the BRICS countries in particular.

There is no any evidence, moreover, that putative own BRICS academic rankings would anyhow help the situation. On the one hand, there already exist some BRICS and “emerging economies” academic rankings being issued by both Times Higher Education and QS. These rankings, however, are almost identical to the world ones as far as the measurement and metrics are concerned. The only real difference seems to be artificial geographical limitations. On the other hand, even if BRICS does create its own new university ranking mechanism, it would inevitably keep the main drawbacks of the existing world academic rankings. The point is that the task of taking into account the needs of such different societies and educational systems with the aim of incorporating all of them into a unified ranking mechanism does not really make any sense. Any unified ranking would necessarily be too abstract, and, thus, would not take into consideration different needs of the BRICS societies. One of the important things in this respect is that what is needed for the majority of the BRICS countries is an inclusive quality education, which is very difficult to measure internationally and which, therefore, is not really measured at all by the main rankings focused instead upon universities research performance.

“Horizontal” University Networks: Addressing Common Problems

An answer to the misbalances of the obsession with the world academic rankings is given by the horizontal academic networks of the universities of the similar position and status, who share general approaches to the common problems of the similar societies. These networks could be seen as an emerging alternative model of the university collaboration and higher education development.

The still dominating model of the university interaction is the model of “vertical” collaboration of the North and South, in which Northern expertise and standards are exchanged for human (students) and material (funding) resources of the Southern nations. S. A. Rye (2014) discerns three main types of such collaboration for the development. The first one is providing free places for the Global South students at the universities of the Global North. It is, by the way, still the main practice of the “educational internationalization”, employed by the Russian government. The second one is connected with establishing higher education institutions of high “international” (that is Northern) quality standards in the Global South countries (via either supporting local universities or through creating foreign campuses of the best universities). Finally, the third type of the vertical collaboration is online education, which provides the students with opportunities of international mobility without actual physical moving. Arguably, all these types of interactions involve certain transfer of the standards in direction of Global South and transfer of the resources in predominantly Northern direction. Even when these collaborations are supported by international donors, they do promote further expansion of the northern standards and culture.

That is why developing horizontal South-South university cooperation is both new and important, because it brings with itself a hope of overcoming dependence of the Southern universities from the values, standards and cultures of the Northern partners. In the overwhelming majority of the cases, however, this collaboration is still just a weak addition to the predominantly hierarchical development-driven North–South collaboration.

BRICS is no exception from this rule. Quite naturally, BRICS is a club, based rather upon pragmatic than normative consensus. The overall goals and immediate tasks of BRICS were always pragmatic: overcoming consequences of the global economic crisis, creating conditions for sustainable development, safeguarding security etc. That is why creation of a common educational area has never been a proper task of the BRICS interactions. As a result, collaboration in research and education among BRICS countries has never been very intensive. The number of co-publications between researchers of any pair of the five countries does not exceed 3% of the total number of publication of the particular BRICS nation (Khomyakov, 2016a, p. 19). The exchange of international students is intense only with China; the double degree programmes between universities of different BRICS countries are also very rare.

Speaking about the number of the international degree-seeking students from the BRICS countries in the best Russian universities, it differs greatly. In 2017 of 5498 students from the BRICS countries in 12 Russian universities – participants of the BRICS Network University, 5120 were from China, 191 from South Africa, 136 from India and only 39 were from Brazil.

In many respects, thus, educational collaboration of the BRICS countries is still very much in the plans rather than in reality. One of the possible reasons is the difference between the educational systems of the BRICS nations (with the exception of China and Russia), which simply cannot be meaningfully compared with each other. All these facts allowed Ph. G. Altbach and R. M. Basset to claim that the concept of

the BRICS block “is actually of little relevance in understanding the complex higher education environment” (Altbach & Basset, 2014, p. 2).

It can also be argued, however, that if BRICS is to develop and to provide a real alternative vision of the world-making, it is bound to have something to tell to the world not only in terms of sheer pragmatism, but also in terms of the values. To become sustainable, BRICS (and, generally, other members of the Global South) should obtain a normative dimension. Arguably, any real value-framework, however, does require a common educational and research area as well as rich cultural interactions between countries. Thus, if the BRICS project is to be considered seriously as a viable alternative to the existing world-making model, it has to eventually include all these aspects. If BRICS countries are to become real leaders of the consolidated Global South, they should find their own way in education and research. Otherwise, BRICS club would not live up to its own promise and it will be more or less quickly substituted by another, more viable alternative.

The most successful attempt to build international common educational and research area we can find is in the Bologna process along with other important European initiatives, such as organizing Erasmus academic mobility programme or establishing European University Institute in Florence. On the one hand, when they try to create joint educational projects, BRICS experts must certainly learn from these experiences. But, on the other hand, the possibilities of borrowing are very limited due to the fact that the links between BRICS countries simply cannot be so tight and their interrelations so intense as they are between European member-states. BRICS club naturally does not aspire for establishing political unity or common market, and, thus, it cannot aim at developing intensely common educational and research area.

The normative framework for this collaboration is still to be developed, although I will briefly discuss some possible candidates for this role in the last section of this chapter. As for the general idea, the very concept of the Global Emerging South with inherent understanding of the horizontally structured collaboration could be seen as a basis for such collaboration. In such understanding, BRICS is not simply anti-globalist movement directed against the prevailing neo-liberal world-order, but is an important attempt to provide an alternative vision of development devoid of the remnants of imperialism and colonialism. The ideas of the Global South, development and interpretations of modernity are then crucial for such collaboration.

These ideas lie behind the most developed of the BRICS educational projects, the BRICS Network University (NU). The network consists of 56 universities from all five BRICS countries, jointly implementing Master and PhD programmes in the six priority areas of the BRICS studies: economics, water resources, IT, ecology, and energy. Being established by the MOU, signed by the Ministers of Education of the BRICS countries, the Network University involves complex horizontal coordination mechanism, based upon the principles of what has been announced as a new concept of the development. In other words, all efforts were taken to ensure equality and autonomy of the participants in the project, which should eventually become a basis for the sustainable university collaboration of the BRICS countries.

Unlike European University Institute, this BRICS initiative is a network without its own developed infrastructure that is without buildings, libraries and computers. Unlike Shanghai Cooperation Organization Network University (another network initiated by Russia), the BRICS NU does not imply existence of a permanent secretariat or rector's office. Unlike European Erasmus programme, it does not have, at least at the initial stage, any consolidated budget, so that each country is supposed to finance independently the participating universities.

The President of the BRICS NU is appointed on the annual basis by the current BRICS Chair country, whereas it is the International Governing Board (IGB), which collectively takes all strategic decisions. The Board consists of 15 permanent members, representing universities and ministries of education of all five countries. Following the rules of the other BRICS bodies, all decisions are taken on the consensus basis and do not imply a voting mechanism. On the national level, the activity of the BRICS NU is organized by certain National Coordinating Committees, composed by the representatives of the individual universities. Finally, all substantial issues are discussed at the six international thematic groups, organized in accordance with the six priority areas. Thus, the whole system of coordination is rather complex and consists of national and international, formal and substantial, ministerial and universities-related bodies. The complexity of the system inevitably makes the decision-making process sometimes very long and always quite difficult; there is, however, a shared understanding that only such a system really corresponds to the principles of equality and autonomy of the horizontal BRICS collaboration.

One of the most problematic and at the same time important issues in this context is of how the financial decisions are taken and through which mechanism the participating universities are supported. According to the MOU on the establishment of the BRICS NU, the financial matters are domestic responsibility of each BRICS country. Some of them (Brazil in 2015, South Africa in 2017) decided to allocate finance to individual institutions, Russia is going to support incoming students through the mechanism of the subsidized places at the participant universities (starting at least from 2019, when the network is supposed to generate the first exchange students mobility), while India considers supporting the BRICS NU activity through the University grant commission, which provides funding for all universities in the country. China has not decided on the mechanism at the time of writing, probably because it would need first to define clearly relations between the BRICS Network University on the one hand and China-financed project of the BRICS University League, on the other hand. The differences in funding procedures along with the absence of the consolidated budget do add difficulties to the project and reflect its complex nature.

Important aspects of the BRICS NU activity are Internet presence of the project and annual general gatherings (not to mention regular meetings of the individual international thematic groups). The face-to-face meetings of all participants are important for the success of the project. That is why the New Delhi Declaration of the BRICS Ministers of Education (2016) envisages holding annual BRICS NU conferences. Face-to-face interactions between researchers of the BRICS countries,

situated far away from each other, are thus considered to be of high importance for the BRICS NU activity. They are especially significant because individual researchers and professors there still have better knowledge of the relevant activity in the US or Europe than in BRICS or other Global South countries. Since real interactions between individual professors and researchers are considered as the basis for the successful networking activity, BRICS NU envisages extensive face-to-face work.

As for the Internet presence, apart from the project web page (<https://nu-brics.ru>), several groups inside of the project are currently working upon on-line courses in the main BRICS NU priority areas. In total, international thematic groups for the moment are working on 22 joint master and PhD programmes. Of them 6 have already been opened for the students (4 in computer sciences and 2 in ecology and climate change), and other 18 are going to enroll the first students in 2018 and 2019. Namely, there will be opened 1 additional programme in computer sciences, 4 programmes in the BRICS studies, 4 programmes in economics, 4 programmes in energy, 1 programme in water resources and pollution treatment, and 2 additional programmes in ecology and climate change. It is clear that with, all these programmes in place, the BRICS NU will become the largest, the most comprehensive and certainly the most ambitious project as far as South–South cooperation in education is concerned. That is why today BRICS NU is justly treated as a flagship project of educational collaboration among emerging countries. However, difficulties with funding, uneven participation in the project and complex mechanism of the decision-making do make development of these programs a difficult and rather long process.

There is also another, quite different, initiative which is usually also mentioned in the context of educational collaboration of the BRICS nations. Namely, the BRICS University League, a voluntary university association, is regularly referred to by various BRICS Declarations and Statements. Being officially initiated by five Russian and five Chinese Universities in 2013, it is coordinated now by Beijing Normal University (China). Unlike the Network University, the League is rather slow in developing its activities. It still lacks a signed charter, a developed plan of the activities and a clear organizational structure. In a way, this organization is still to be established. The main difference of the League compared to the BRICS Network University project consists in its purely voluntary nature that is in its being formed independently from any official ministerial decision. The idea, thus, is that its activity would be complimentary to the work of the BRICS Network University.

Conclusion

As it has been argued in the previous sections, sustainable educational and research collaboration of the BRICS countries is impossible without a more comprehensive normative framework, justifying its ambitions. Namely, if the BRICS club is just another neo-imperial gathering of the countries trying to enhance their international standing and to get their share of the post-colonial market, it cannot be expected to provide a viable alternative to the existing world-order. In this case, collaboration of these countries will remain purely pragmatic, which, in the absence of the strong

common interest, will inevitably tear the club apart. We have already witnessed such processes in the conflict between India and China over construction of a road in Bhutan; Brazilian u-turn after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment (and especially after recent election of Jair Bolsonaro) is another example of the looming dangers, which might threaten the very BRICS existence. After all, when established common institutions are absent, too much seems to depend upon the current political course and will of each of the BRICS countries.

It is not very clear, however, what the normative framework, which can help to overcome such problems, could be. After all, as it has been already noted, the BRICS countries are so different and are situated so far away from each other, that it would be difficult to locate the long-standing interests and features they have in common. One thing, however, is very clear from the very beginning: the BRICS club is sustainable only as a leader of a consolidated Global South. Even if it contains Russia with its Arctic regions, Northern ambitions and rich imperial past, the BRICS does make sense only as an articulation of the interests of Global South. The idea is that through BRICS the Global South will participate in the alternative global governance to a level they hitherto have not. Only in this case is participation of such small countries as South Africa justified: it takes part in BRICS projects as a leader of the whole African continent. Similarly, Brazil represents South America, Russia leads Central Asia, China represents Far East and South-East Asia, while India expresses interests of Southern Asia. Of course, one could ask if these countries are able to represent the regions they are supposed to lead, if they have necessary moral and material power and whether they are really credible and trustworthy. All these questions would not change, however, the fact that the only way for the BRICS to become sustainable is to inspire confidence and hope in the Global South as a whole.

The idea of Global South makes sense, however, if there is a possibility for alternative vision of the social development. In other words, consolidation of the Global South is possible if development or progress is not a straight way from one point to another. This means rejection of the modernization theory, at least in its classical post-Second World War version. The problem is that "theories of modernization in the 1960s understood the combination of autonomy and rational control as realized solely and definitively in the institutions that emerged in Europe and the US... As a result, modernization in newly developing countries was understood as an imitation of that which had occurred in more advanced countries" (Larrain, 2007, p. 41). Unlike theory of modernization as a single way to establishing a set of distinctly modern institutions, the new theory understands modernity as "experience and interpretation" of the modern condition. We are now talking, then, on plural modernities, rather than single modernization of different societies. Now, how is this understanding possible?

After Johann Arnason's and Peter Wagner's seminal works on modernity (Arnason, 1989; Wagner, 1994) it has become almost commonplace to refer to Cornelius Castoriadis's characterization of modernity as based upon a certain "double imaginary signification". Namely, the modern period, according to Castoriadis, "is best defined by the conflict, but also the mutual contamination and entanglement, of two imaginary significations: autonomy on the one hand, unlimited expansion of

‘rational mastery’, on the other. They ambiguously coexisted under the common roof of ‘reason’” (Castoriadis, 1997, pp. 37–38). Arnason thinks of these two principles, or, rather, “significations” as having divergent, mutually irreducible logics so that “the pursuit of the unlimited power over nature does not necessarily enhance the capacity of human society to question and reshape its own institutions, and a coherent vision of the autonomous society excludes an unquestioning commitment to the more or less rationalized phantasm of total mastery” (Arnason, 1989, p. 327). These logics, however, are not only divergent, but also “entangled”, and both are present in modernity from its very outset (Carlenden, 2010, p. 57). In short, “modernity has two goals – to make man master and possessor of nature, and to make human freedom possible. The question that remains is whether these two are compatible with one another” (Gillespie, 2008, p. 42).

Importantly, these two pillars of modernity are not definite principles; they are rather significations, in other words, “multiform complexes of meaning that give rise to more determinate patterns and at the same time remain open to other interpretations” (Arnason, 1989, p. 334). The interpretations are given and the definite patterns are formed, in their turn, in real historical situations by real people, and thus reflect complex interplay of different elements, including other imaginary significations, pre-modern traditions, popular sentiments or political considerations. The question of how these patterns are formulated against a particular socio-historical background is, then, one of the most important and interesting questions arising in the study of modernity. These patterns represent what could be called different trajectories of modernity.

Without going into further details of the plural modernity theory, it is worth emphasising that, being based on experiences and interpretations, particular modernity constellations or trajectories are formed by real people in real time and space and therefore do differ from place to place. This in its turn means that Global South is not an “underdeveloped” region in need of modernization according to the external northern standards; it is not less “modern” than “developed” countries of the Global North. However, it is alternatively modern.

The plural modernity theory thus opens up interpretative space for understanding Global South not simply as a competitor, but rather as an alternative to the Global North. In education, the patterns of North–South collaboration as well as the activities of various excellence programmes most closely correspond to the classical idea of educational modernization, whereas horizontal networks make sense as alternative ways of organizing international collaboration in education only in the framework of the plural modernity theory.

Rejection of the classical modernization idea has, however, some important consequences. One of them is abandoning traditional development concept, based upon aid and involving complex mechanisms of discipline and control. This development has always been a form of colonial education of the underdeveloped barbarians. Such approach is best expressed in the famous J. S. Mill’s passage: “Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and be justified by actually effecting that end. Liberty as a principle has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind

have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion" (Mill, 1977, p. 224). Such development projects are quite justly questioned and criticized by many post-development scholars (Escobar, 1995; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997).

However, as rejection of modernization does not imply abandoning the concept of modernity altogether, pitfalls of the classical development concept should not lead us to the rejection of the development theory as such. Of course, in the framework of plural modernity theory, development could not be treated anymore as an effective transfer of good institutions from one place to another. As the experience of many former Soviet Union countries have recently demonstrated, such transfer in the majority of the cases is rather counter-productive. Thus, almost in all countries of the former Soviet Union, the deficiencies of the "transferred" institutions are obvious (for democracy, for example, see Rozin, 2017; Fish, 2005). Even if the exact causes of these deficiencies are not always completely clear, the efficiency of any institutional "transfer" is questionable. If one, however, recognizes each country's possibility to be modern in its own way, the sought-after development can only be in growing its own institutions, based upon particular constellation of modernity. In other words to be effective the development has to fit the trajectory of the society in question.

The new concept of the development as a basis for BRICS countries' interactions has been recently (2015) proposed by the scholars of BRICS Studies Centre in Fudan University (Shanghai). The concept implies "non-zero sum game" win-win development based upon principles of autonomy (independence), equality, inclusiveness and sustainability (green development) (Win-win Cooperation, 2015; Fan, 2016). Autonomy in this concept means independent choice of the development path, while equality "refers to... equal treatment of all economic actors internally and to equal participation international economic competition externally" (Fan, 2016, p. 5). Both autonomy and equality are notoriously absent in traditional development instrument, where BRICS countries together have only 13% of votes in World Bank and 14.29% in IMF, while the US alone, for example, has 15% and 16.6% of the votes respectively.

The inclusiveness means complimentary character of all instruments and channels of the development, so that BRICS New Development Bank, for example, does not substitute traditional instruments, but rather compliments their activity. In this sense, inclusiveness, according to Yongming Fan (2016), means inclusiveness both in cooperation and in competition, and guarantees against exclusivist approach of the Global South. Since in late modernity fast development almost always entails environmental issues, new concept of the development should be based upon the principle of the "harmonious coexistence between human beings and environment and between individuals and society in the progress of development" (Fan, 2016, p. 6). In a way, new concept of the development is still a general idea only. However, it has to be further developed if BRICS is really going to offer a valuable alternative to the existing structures of power, including academic ones.

Collaboration of the BRICS countries, thus, normatively makes sense if it is going to promote for all countries of the Global South a new concept of the development based upon plural understanding of modernity. This understanding of BRICS cooperation is rather thick, and, frankly speaking, is quite far from what this

collaboration looks like today. However to make this cooperation sustainable BRICS must seriously think of becoming a real leader of the Global South, which, in its turn, is impossible without employing plural modernity theory and without elaborating a new concept of development.

However, this is impossible without creating a common educational area. Joint educational projects are capable of bringing normative dimension into the purely pragmatic BRICS bloc. Through various excellence projects, BRICS countries participate in the life of Global Academia and compete in educational market according to the rules set by the dominating academic powers. To make the development sustainable they have, however, to support the horizontal networks, which would both further elaborate and implement the principles of the new theory of the development and incorporate real experiences and interpretations of the modernity condition. The most successful of these networks for the moment is BRICS Network University, a unique and ambitious initiative of the BRICS ministries of education. The question is, however, to which extent BRICS is capable to become a speaker for the Global South as a whole, since without this it would turn into another pragmatic international organization, pursuing its own particular egoistic interests. What is also important is that education plays a pivotal role in all attempts to answer the questions above.

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